



TEACHING MINDFULNESS TO REDUCE STRESS AND PROMOTE WELLBEING IN CHILDREN

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PROJECT QUESTIONS: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TEACHING CHILDREN MINDFULNESS? SPECIFICALLY, IS IT AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO REDUCE STRESS?

Background

I started volunteering at Portland Tennis & Education (PT&E) since January of 2020. PT&E is a non-profit organization in St. John's, a low-income community in North Portland. It serves resilient youth in grades k-12; 95% of students are youth of color and 81% are bilingual. Children who participate in the PT&E program receive academic support, professional tennis lessons, and life skills building.

I chose to partner with PT&E because I wanted to work with kids, specifically kids who came from low SES families and were considered a minority in their communities. Additionally, PT&E was a good fit for the mindfulness intervention program I was designing because they had a relevant age group, kids in grades 4th-6th who aren't too young to understand the concepts of the exercises and activities or too old to be considered adolescents.

Methods

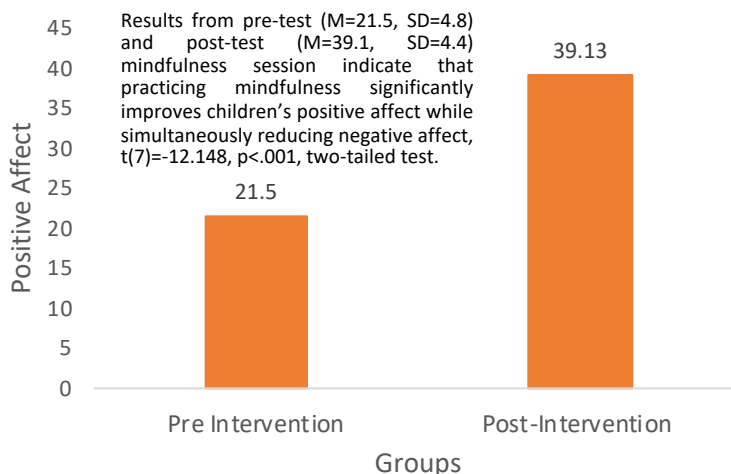
8 children in grades 4th-6th participated in the mindfulness intervention program. We met once a week for 30 minutes where I would teach them mindfulness-based practices. To measure stress students completed three standardized tests at baseline and post-intervention. Additionally, students filled out the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) before and after each session.

References

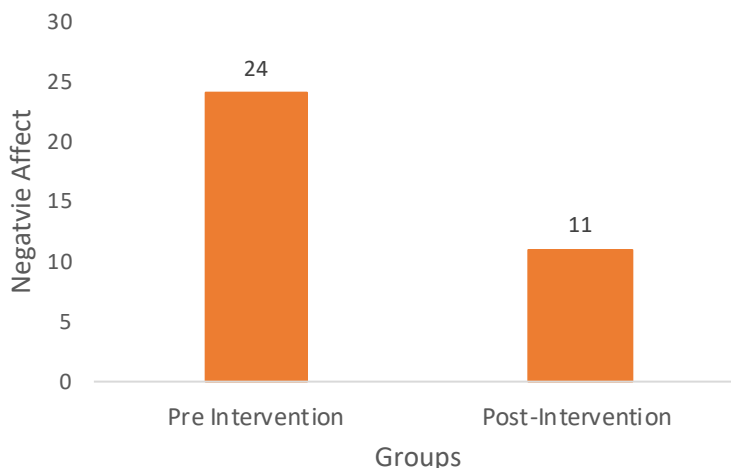
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2. Amy Saltzman, Still Quiet Place, Menlo Park, California; Philippe Goldin, & Stanford University. (2008). *Mindfulness-based stress reduction for school-age children*
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Results

Mindfulness Significantly Increases Children's Self-Report of *Positive Emotions*



The Effect of Mindfulness on Children's Experience of *Negative Emotions*



Quotes from children at PT&E

"When I'm mindful, I notice the things I can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch in front of me right now."

"It taught me not to worry if something goes wrong because tomorrow will be a new day and I can start over and try harder."

"It helps me stay calmed and relaxed when I get mad or frustrated."

"Mindfulness makes me feel good and happy."

Discussion

Results show that just one session of mindfulness significantly reduces the children's stress levels. This is demonstrated by an increase in positive affect and a decrease in negative affect. During the first session children learned the basics of mindfulness and were guided through a sitting meditation and deep breathing exercise. Before the session children reported feeling distressed and irritable, and not very interested, but after participating in the mindfulness exercises their distress and irritability diminished and left feeling more engaged. Thus, practicing mindfulness not only helped children feel more relaxed, but also more alert and more concentrated on the present moment.

The program was intended to be 8-weeks long, but due to COVID-19 we were only able to hold one session. However, based on the positive outcomes of this session and the current literature on mindfulness and children (Viafora et al., 2014), it is evident that mindfulness-based practices are an effective way to reduce stress and promote wellbeing in children. With more sessions the results that I presented here would have been more profound because the more children practice mindfulness, the more engaged they become with it and the more likely it is to become a daily habit.

Future research may explore offering mindfulness sessions in Spanish and bringing mindfulness to parents as well as their children.